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Central American Seminar On Violence Against Women

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On March 11 in Managua, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) convened the first Central American forum to address violence against women as a public health issue. Participants included Central American public health workers, politicians, legal experts and feminist organization leaders, as well as invited guests from Cuba, Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic. During a speech, Nicaraguan President Violeta Chamorro said, "It is painful that though we are at the gates of the 21st century, women continue to be objects of aggression." Chamorro said legal reform and campaigns aimed at increasing public awareness constitute the first steps in ending violence against women and girls. Forum participants discussed results of recent studies carried out in Central American nations. Selected highlights of study findings are summarized below. * According to a study based on a sample group of 1,000 Guatemalan women, 48% of respondents were victims of abuse. * A survey of 10,500 Nicaraguan women who had sought legal assistance indicated that over half were motivated by an attempt to stop and/or prosecute abusers. * Researchers in El Salvador asked 200 children if their mothers were victims of physical assault. A total of 57% responded in the affirmative. * The Patronato Nacional de la Infancia in Costa Rica reported that 50% of the 1,388 women who requested assistance between April and May 1990, were victims of physical, sexual or emotional abuse. (Basic data from Agence France-Press, 03/11/92)

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